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A Preliminary Report of Research on the Ogiek Tribe of Kenya

by

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The Ogiek people -- commonly known as "Dorobo" -- are one of the most widely distributed tribes in Kenya, inhabiting, now or in the recent past, virtually all of the high forest areas of Kenya. Traditionally they are a hunting and gathering tribe, though today virtually all of them now have added animal husbandry or cultivation, or both. They are a Kalenjin-speaking people, though a few groups in close proximity to Maasai have now adopted the latter as their domestic language. The origin of the Ogiek is still unclear. Physically they have some characteristics which are not common to their neighbours. The Ogiek consistently maintain that they were in residence in their present locations before the other present-day tribes arrived. Maasai and Kipsigis oral traditions support this. Kipsigis accounts state that the Ogiek originated along with all the Kalenjin peoples in the north and preceeded the Kipsigis in the migration south, settling in the forest areas. Likewise, Kipsigis say the Sirikwa were Kalenjin and also preceeded the Kipsigis, settling in the plains (McIntosh, 1969:74). Some of my Ogiek informants, on the other hand, allege that the Sirikwa were a Maasai-speaking people. Of particular interest, however, is the similarity between pottery associated with Sirikwa sites (e.g. Lanetware) and examples of early type Ogiek pots which I have acquired (Jacobs, personal communication).

The following preliminary report will amplify some of these points, with emphasis on the ecology of the Mau Ogiek with whom I have done most of my research during the past year.

Ogiek Groups and Areas of Occupation

All the Kalenjin-speaking Ogiek in Kenya identify themselves as "Ogiek." Other Kalenjin tribes also refer to them by this name. Maasai-speaking Ogiek, on the other hand, call themselves "Iltorobo," a term by which the Maasai refer to all Ogiek groups. The Iltorobo adamantly claim they are of the same tribe as the Kalenjin Ogiek. This difference in what each group calls itself reflects more their difference in language than any difference in identity.

The Maasai term, "Iltorobo," means "poor people," or persons who much get their meat from wild animals as they have no cattle. As such, Maasai sometimes refer to some of their own tribesmen who live in this manner as "Iltorobo" (Jacobs, personal communication). Other persons or tribes may also be called by this term, regardless of whether they are related to Ogiek. Europeans who first came in to contact with Ogiek usually came through Maasailand and used Maasai-speaking guides; it was only reasonable, therefore, that they would come to know the Ogiek as "Iltorobo" (or by its derivatives of "Dorobo, Ndorobo or Andorobo," or by the Swahili form "Wandorobo"), especially since most Ogiek also speak Maasai as a second language and in that language refer to themselves as Iltorobo. Had Europeans approached the Ogiek from the west, through Kalenjin-speaking peoples, I am certain that today they would more commonly be known by their own name for themselves, Ogiek. Because of the multiple reference of the term "Iltorobo," and because of its foreign origin, it is both desirable and reasonable to refer henceforth to the Ogiek only by their own name for themselves.

Having been introduced to Ogiek through the eyes of neighbouring tribes, Europeans have taken on the numerous prejudices and misconceptions about the Ogiek which these tribes have of them. As a result, they are one of the most misunderstood peoples in Kenya. The relations which Ogiek have with neighbouring tribes are both complex and subtle, in part because of the true and distorted conceptions each has of the other. It would take a separate article to do justice to this topic alone.

Huntingford has published the most extensive works on the Ogiek. Though his research was conducted among only one group, he does mention 11 other groups in Kenya, all of them in or at the edge of high forest areas (Huntingford, 1951:2). For the Mau Forest area, he mentions three groups. I have found that the number is actually much greater than this. On the Mau Forest alone there are at least 13 groups. For Kenya as a whole, there may be as many as 30 Ogiek groups. There is at least one group in Tanzania, the Mosiro, who are Ogiek who are said to have come from the Tuken Hills. Unlike other groups, they have adapted themselves to a dry forest environment (Jacobs, personal communication).

Each Ogiek group identifies itself as a separate social unity from other groups. They each have their own name for themselves, though they may refer to other groups by names other than the one used by each of those groups. There is, however, no Ogiek term of reference that means "group;" rather they speak of "people of Kaplelach, or people of Saleta." Each group has a defined territory of forest. On the Mau the groups vary in size from 150 to 1000 persons.

Social Organization of Ogiek Groups

There are no corporately-organized institutions which encompass the whole of any Ogiek group. There are, for example, no group chiefs or clan leaders, nor any formally organized "council of elders." Indeed, at no time do all the members of a group, or representatives of those members, participate in formally organized activities, either economic, political or religious. The identity which members of a group feel for each other derives mainly from proximity: viz., from living together in daily face to face interactions. This is secondarily reinforced by a feeling or knowledge of a historical relationship which sets the group off from other adjacent groups. Each group is made up of lineages, called "kap," whose members, either as a whole or in part, from time to time in the past, may have left their "natal" group to go and reside with another group. In time such groups become known as members of the new group which they have joined. For this reasons (as well as others), group identity is based primarily on "who you live with" and less on genealogical relationship.

The name of any particular Ogiek group may derive from a number of sources. The "Maresionik" group, for example, say that they once had a leader (the only group ever claiming to have had such a leader!) known by this name. There are two unrelated groups called by the same name, "Kipchorng'wonek," meaning "people who steal poison." Arrow poisons for these two groups would be an especially valuable item, as the location of the best trees for making poison is a considerable distance from the territory of these two groups. The "Kaplelach" group does not know for certain the origin of their name; one informant suggested a river which has whitish colored water, which flows through their territory, as the word lelach means "white." Albinos have been known to have been born in this groups, which may also account for the group name.

The Lineage (kap)

All patrilineally-related persons belong to the same named "lineage" or kap. When three or four generations separate collateral lines in a kap, each begins to be known by a separate senior ancestor. For example, the descendents of Meng'wari say the name of their kap is "Kap Meng'wari." Meng'wari is best remembered as a brave man who had killed several enemies. In honour, his sons took his name as the name of their kap. Meng'wari's brother was Olbelesit, but his descendents choose to be known by his eldest son, Sandiko, i.e., Kap Sandiko. Nevertheless members of both kaps assert they are the same kap despite the two names.

The kap is the principle social institution of the Ogiek, at least for those Ogiek living on the Mau. Huntingford (1951) reports that for the group he studied on the edge of the Tinderet forest,

the clan (oret) was the most important social unit. For the Mau Ogiek the kap is the land holding unit, the unit which is responsible for giving girls in marriage, negotiating and paying compensation in legal cases, and a unit of residence. Though the eldest male in the kap acts as an informal spokesman for his lineage, decision-making is a function of all adult male members of the kap. Typically a kap will include a man and one or two of his father's brother's sons, plus their children and children's children. If it is a large kap it may include families of distant paternal cousins as well. Kap size varies from 50 to 80 members. Most male members tend to live in the general vicinity of each other, in or near their kap territory, though some individuals live with their wife's parents.

The Clan (oret)

Among the Mau Ogiek the importance of patrilineal clans is negligible. Among groups who live near Kipsigis, clan names are the same as those for Kipsigis, and those Ogiek identify themselves as being of the same clan as the Kipsigis of that clan. The same is true for groups near the Maasai. The usual explanation I get from informants is that clans were not indigenous to the Ogiek, that those persons who lived near Maasai adopted the clan of a friend they made with Maasai, usually a friendship based on the convenience of trading honey for meat. Among those Ogiek near Kipsigis the explanation may be the same, but often in the past when times were hard and food was difficult to come by, many Ogiek went and lived in Kipsigis country and either married into, or adopted the clan of, a friend. When they later returned to Ogiek country they retained the clan designation. Although theoretically one can expect aid from clan members in paying compensation for various offenses, especially murder, among the Ogiek this function rarely if ever comes up. Other than this possibility, the Ogiek claim no other function for the clan. In their eyes it is a useful bridge by which to cement otherwise ambivalent relations with individuals of another tribe for their mutual economic benefit.

The Age-Set System (Ipinda)

The Mau Ogiek, even those closest to Kipsigis, have a Maasai-type age-set system, with the same organization terminology and generally the same functions. The ceremony of initiation shows a superficial resemblance to both Kipsigis and Maasai ceremonies, though in neither case does it rival the elaborateness of these two tribes. The Ogiek have never been exempt from inter-or intra-tribal conflict, and they conceive of their muranik, the initiated warriors, as their first line of defense. Those groups of Ogiek who have the cattle to contend with raids from other tribes, even from other Ogiek groups. The Ogiek groups without cattle were no more immune, however. Maasai have been known to take advantage of the relative weakness of any Ogiek when spoiling for a fight.

Moreover, inter-lineage feuds have occured, sometimes extending over a period of years and resulting in the death of most of their members, male and female. Even today fears of being attacked effects the precautions the Ogiek take with their stock and families. Those fears are well founded. Not long ago I was staying in a village which was attacked by a number of Maasai.

If the vocation of the warriors may be primarily defensive, their avocation has traditionally been offensive, the pursuit of large game. Until recently groups of morans would go on extended safaris out into the plains for the joy of shooting elephant, rhino and buffalo. One group of 8 morans in a seven-year period killed an estimated 50 elephants, 100 rhinos and 300 buffalo.

The Ecology of the Mau Ogiek

Like any tribe which derives the bulk of its subsistence from non-domestic sources, it is impossible to understand the Ogiek without a fairly complete understanding of the environment in which they live. Unlike most hunting and gathering peoples, the environment of the Ogiek is unusually complex. Actually they utilize several environments

which occur at different elevations from about 6500 feet up to 10,000 feet. This significantly increases their ability to find different foods during the varying climatic conditions that prevail during a year. Because several ecological zones are compressed into an area of only 20 to 40 miles in width, from 6500 to 10,000 feet, it is ordinarily possible for the Ogiek to remain relatively stationary. A hunting and gathering tribe living in a single zone area, such the relatively level open plains and dry forest of Maasai country would find it necessary to spend considerable time moving, following the migrations of the game herds over wide areas, as well as following the successive areas in which vegetable foodstuffs ripen.

Environmental Zones on the Mau Escarpment

The Ogiek on the south side of the Mau Escarpment distinguish five principle types of forest. They distinguish these on the basis of the types of vegetation, principally trees, which predominate in each. These forests roughly correspond to different elevation levels. Because of differences in vegetation, different species of fauna will also be found in each forest type. Climatic characteristics also vary for each forest, temperature and rainfall being the most important. All these factors, and others, interact in different ways through the year and each alone and in combination has important effects on how the Ogiek make their living. A brief description of these zones will be useful.

1. Soyua: Elevation 65-7500 feet; mean annual rainfall 25-40 inches. A relatively dry forest, shortish trees, thick underbrush, interspersed with open grasslands. Predominate game are Impala, Tomi, waterbuck, zebra, wildebeest, warthog, hyrax, elephant, rhino, buffalo, lion, eland. Occupied mainly by Maasai.

2. Sasaondet: elevation 75-8000; rainfall 40-50". Compared to Soyua this forest is taller, has more substantial trees, underbrush is less thick, and has few grassland areas. Expect for one, all the predominant trees are different from those of Soyua. Predominant game are Giant Forest Hog, Bongo, Suni, Red Duiker, Bushbuck, and Blue and Colobus monkey.

3. Tirap: elevation 80-8500; rainfall 50-60". This is a mature forest. Trees tend to be very large, some are six to eight feet in diameter and are more widely spaced. Undergrowth is mostly low, consisting of thick plants. Visibility is greater than in other forests because of the low underbrush and low density of trees. To an outsider this big virgin forest is most impressive, something like a natural cathedral, the high forest canope partly covering over the sky, ones voice almost echoing in the quiet. The predominant game is the same as for Sasaondet plus hyrax.

4. Sisiyuet: elevation 80-8500; rainfall 60-70". This is predominantly a bamboo forest, interspersed with a number of other trees. It is thick, accessibile with difficulty. There are fewer game here, but of the same varieties as in Tirap.

5. Olopirigit or Mau: elevation 8500 and over; rainfall 50-60". This forest is similar to Tirap, but it is widely interspersed with open glades of moorlands. In these glades are found some zebra, ordinarily found only in the low Soyua forest areas. Other game in this forest is about the same as for Tirap, though the proportion of each species varies.

From Soyua to Mau the escarpment rises gradually over a 30 mile distance. Also as elevation rises the rainfall increases while the night temperature decreases, especially during the rains. Rain is seasonal, the short rains usually coming in October and November, the long rains in March and April. There is, however, considerable variation from year to year. This year was unusually dry. Rain in the higher elevations is not only heavier but also comes more frequently throughout the year.

The south side of the Mau Escarpment, as it rises gradually from south to north is divided along this axis by a number of parallel streams. Between these streams gently rounded ridges extend upwards

through each of these forest types. If you were to travel from east to west, through the country of the Kapsupulek, Kaplelach and Kipchorng'wonck, you would cross over about 18 of these ridges and streams. If you went from south to north up the escarpment you would follow one of the ridges to the top without crossing any streams.

Land Tenure

Each Kap or lineage, in theory, is an owner of one ridge, with certain rights over the use of the forests through which that ridge passes. All the land belonging to a Kap is divided into a number of korosiek (koret, sing.), the smallest territorial unit of the Ogiek. One Kap may own as many as 50 korosiek, though the area of any one may vary from less than a square mile up to five or ten square miles, though frequently the latter will be divided into a number of small korosiek. All the land which a Kap owns along a ridge may extend from one to two miles in width between the streams on either side of the ridge, to a length of 30 miles up the Escarpment. This would be the maximum size of land for a Kap. Another Kap may own half or a quarter of this size area, either because their territory does not extend to the lower elevations or up to the high elevations. There is one kap which has a small area because the rivers that border it meet in Sasaondet, cutting off their ridge, and hence their land from the forests below. Along the top of each ridge is a path that leads from Soyua to Mau which is the main artery for getting from one place to another. A path in Ogiek is called oret (the term for "clan"), but the particular path which goes up through one's territory is called konoito (konoituek, pl.), and in fact all the land of one's kap which lies along this path is called by the same name. Not all the land which a kap owns, however, may be in its konito. Sometime in the past a Kap may have received one or more korosiek from another Kap. There are a number of situations in which this has happened. A Kap may begin to use a koret that is not claimed by any other Kap, and in time it becomes the owner. A Kap may wish to purchase a koret from another Kap, if, for example, it feels it does not have enough land in a certain forest. These two examples I have found only to occur in Soyua, where the importance of retaining ownership to land is emphasized less. A man, when he gives his daughter in marriage, may choose through his own generosity to give a koret to his daughter for the use of her husband, ownership thereafter being transfered to the husband's Kap. In the past a koret was given as compensation to another Kap for the killing of one of its members. A Kap may permit a person or an entire Kap to use one or more of its own korosiek if the latter does not have sufficient korosiek for its own needs. The number of korosiek given out in these ways, however, remains small compared to the total number of korosiek extant.

Each Kap has a traditional place of residence to which they usually return from journeys into different forests. The major part of the year will be spent at this place. Off and on during the year as new food resources become available in the different forests, the men, and sometimes the whole family, will migrate to other forest areas for a period of a few days up to as long as three months, then return home, Almost invariably these traditional home sites are between 7,300-7,700 feet, on the border between Soyua and Sasaondet or just inside Sasaondet. There are a number of reasons for this. Sasaondet, in this respect, is important as you can get a plentiful supply of certain kinds of firewood, and also you can get a vine which is utilized daily as an equivalent to rope. Being near Soyua is desirable because it affords a wide variety of animals for meat. It is safer to hunt elephant, rhino and buffalo in Soyua because there are sufficient open areas to be able to run quickly from a wounded animal. Also the extraction of honey from hives is easier in Soyua then in other forests, as will be explained later. Tirap as a place of residence has the disadvantage of not having, in any one place, a sufficient supply of appropriate dry firewood. Sisiyuet, being mostly bamboo, is a hopeless place to live for more then a few days. Mau is like Tirap, but colder and wetter, two characteristics which make it generally an unpleasant place to stay for any period of time. Again, Soyua, while suitable in some ways mentioned,

is dangerous because of the presence of 'enemies' (like Maasai); elephants make sleeping at night a constant danger; and if it rains, one does not have the protective canopy of big trees to partially shield the camp site. As a result, the lower edge of Sasaondet, being also relatively dry and warm, is the most reasonable place to live. As Ogiek acquire cows, sheep and goats, many of them have found it necessary to live in the grasslands of either Soyua or Mau, and also as cultivators they have had to make gardens where ever they can find grass for the cows. Thus, they are subject to all the disadvantages mentioned above plus the fact that Soyua sometimes proves too dry for gardening --(this year the crop was poor!)-- while Mau is so cold that it takes 12 months for a crop of maize to mature. In addition, cattle theft and disease is an ever present threat when living near other tribes, as is necessary in Soyua and Mau.

Subsistence Patterns

The Maasai refer derisively to the Ogiek as "mere animals." There is something to be said for this idea, though not for the reasons the Maasai have in mind. It is useful to conceive of the Ogiek, in their quest for satisfying their needs, as one more species in the ecosystem, going about its search for food in a number of ways that are quite similar to other animals and birds. The Ogiek may be the most versitile species in that they can extract and utilize a wider range of fauna and flora. This, however, may only mean that they have not reached the efficiency of other species in extracting larger quantities of food from just a few sources. Also, in terms of energy and time expended, I am not sure which species is the more efficient. Whether the Ogiek do any better than the animals in time of distress is questionable. During the age-set of Il Peles, about 100 years ago, there apparently was a great drought. A large portion of the Ogiek are alleged to have starved to death. Apparently a lot of animals did too for there was not enough to subsist on. The bees produced no honey. Many of the Ogiek who managed to survive did so by going to live with the Kipsigis. Though the Ogiek have never had such a hard time since, they do have lean years. In situations where the supply of meat and honey is not enough, the Ogiek maintain that they have always gone to the Kipsigis or other agricultural tribe and bought or begged food, or to the Maasai, usually to be given diseased cattle that have died. This pattern of extending their range of resources when the preferred ones give out apparently is very old. The Ogiek see no reasons why they have not done this for many generations, and as far as memory extends, they say this has been so. This past year I noticed many Ogiek relying heavily on beans, potatoes, but principally maize bought in the market. Though honey is the most important cash "crop", in its absence, the Ogiek can support themselves by making and selling articles to the Maasai, usually sheaths for swords and a type of sweet smelling necklace made from cattle tissue and the leaves of a certain plant that the Maasai prize. The whole list of things which Ogiek sell or trade with Maasai and other tribes is fairly extensive, and probably has been for a long time.

The core of traditional Ogiek subsistence, as already alluded to, is meat and honey. If one were to exclude the intake of food derived from gardening --(which in reality has probably never happened)-- the average Ogiek would eat about 5 pounds of meat and 2 pounds of honey per day during the honey season, and virtually all meat when there was no honey. A man who is active can eat half again as much as that in a day.

One of the most striking things about Ogiek diet is the vital lack of collected wild vegetation. Many people, especially adult males, may go a whole year without any. It is mostly children who will go out and collect whatever berry or root may be ripe and gorge themselves on it, perhaps everyday for a couple of weeks or until the season of that plant has passed. For the whole forest the Ogiek know of less than a dozen types of vegetation which they eat. It is my impression that a wide range and quantity of these foodstuffs are to be found only in the drier climates where roots and tubers are sufficiently large to insure the survival of the plant through periods of dryness, and that seeds, especially nuts, are sizable and

meaty so as to nurture the seeds through the dry period until they can establish themselves. In any case the Ogiek do not find much of these types of food in their environment. That they do not exploit the few they have more systematically may be because these berries ripen after the rains at the same time that honey is being produced in the same areas, and honey is the perferred food.

Honey Collecting

Honey is by far the most important substance in Ogiek life. Its uses and significance far exceed any other commodity. As a liquid mixed with water, fermented or not, it is the principle substance of ritual and social communication and exchange. By itself it is the most valued, if not most plentiful, food and medium of trade. Without honey and all the conditions of getting it, Ogiek life would surely be entirely different.

The production of honey depends on the bees, which in turn depend on the flowering of trees and plants. Flowering, however, only comes when there has been sufficient, but not too much, rain. If there is too much rain, that is, rain over an extended period of time, the felling drops will destroy the flowers before the bees can get at the nectar. A fairly consistent rainfall of at least two weeks will be enough to produce flowers in most trees, if they are ready to bud. Rain patterns vary through the year by altitude and location. "If you wish honey", as the Ogiek say, you must follow the flowers, just as the bees do. One fellow remarked to me when I first came, "If you want to understand the Ogiek, you must first understand the bees." There is some truth to this. The bees migrate with the flowers, finding a new home where they go and there spend their time collecting the nectar until they are full or the supply is exhausted. Similarly, the Ogiek follow the bees, making new homes where they go, spending their time collecting honey until they too are full or the supply is exhausted; then, like the bees, they move on if there is flowering elsewhere. If not, they both remain and consume what they have.

To facilitate the reliability of finding honey, the Ogiek make hives from the trunks of a number of species of tree which they hollow out and wrap with cedar bark ("to keep the bees warm"). These hives, up to 5 feet long and 2 feet diameter, are placed high in the branches of suitable trees throughout the various korosiek in a Kap's konoito (locations in his lineage's territory). The purpose of placing the hives so high, especially in trees with no lower branches, is to discourage the predations of the honey badger. Most hives will be 30 to 50 feet above ground, some as high as 80 feet, with the lowest branch being 40 feet above ground. Even still, occassionally the honey badger will get up to a hive, break it open and devour the honey. The hive is useless then until it is taken down and repaired It is a lot of effort to put hives so high in the trees, to say nothing of the time and energy involved in getting up there each time you want to get honey. Another way is to hang hives from a limb by vines. This alone usually discourages the honey badger, so it is possible to place hives only a few feet above the ground in easily accessible positions. But this is done only in Soyua. In the higher forests there is too much rain and the vines rot quickly, the hive being destroyed on falling. In Soyua, however, there are other tribes who are easily tempted to steal from low hives.

Making a hive is also time consuming. A minimum of a day is necessary to shape a hive, and another day to take it to the forest and put it in a tree. Either carrying the hive or going for honey can mean long distances through thick forest. In all it is exhausting work, but work which the Ogiek generally enjoy. For all his effort, an average man may bring home 200 pounds of honey a year, the majority of which he will sell for cash to buy other foods, clothes and other shop items. When in the forest, however, a man continually is eating honey as he collects it, some from each hive, so his intake is considerably higher than the amount he brings home would indicate.

The Ogiek are quite emphatic that the reason they have separate territory for each Kap --(and even within each Kap related families

have separate korosiek)-- is to avoid disputes. They say the most likely type of dispute would result from two or more people claiming the same tree for putting their hive in. Suitable trees are not that numerous. The other type of dispute would come from claims of honey theft if people, especially those unrelated, were to be allowed to put hives near each other. There is some substance of these allegations in that rights over territory are primarily just rights over the use of that territory for putting hives and collecting honey. Any person can hunt and trap and live in another Kap's territory ("why not?, the animals have no owners," say the Ogiek). Putting one's hive in another's territory, cutting bark for hives, or taking honey from another's territory is a serious offense, nowadays punishable with a 100/- fine or its equivalent. Exclusive rights over territory do not extend to Soyua, however. There any person can put a hive in any place. The reason for this is the presence of other tribes, chiefly Maasai, in this open forest who make it impossible to tell who stole from a particular hive. In the high forests, where only Ogiek go, it is not difficult to find out who probably took your honey by merely asking around as to who went where on a certain day.

In the course of a year a man may go to the forest a number of times for honey. If there has been flowering in Soyua in an area where a man has no hives he may go anyway in hopes of finding honey in natural hives. He may go with others, even of other Kaps, for as long as a week. Sizable groups are a necessity because of the presence of enemies. Not knowing where natural hives are, however, it is often a poorly rewarded safari. Many times I have seen them come back with only five pounds each or none.

When flowering comes in the high forests, a man and usually his brothers will go for a few days, if they want only honey, or for as long as three months if they also want to stay to build new hives or repair old ones that have been broken by the honey badger, or to collect a large amount of honey. If there is considerable honey collected a man may store some in caves, or in his honey barrel. This is a hive-like structure made from a large hollow log of cedar in which he pours the honey he wishes to save, covering it with bark to preserve it from the rain and logs and stones to discourage the honey badger. Formerly, before the advent of metal debbies, large elongated pots were used for storage. A stone was shaped and placed in the mouth of the pot and sealed with propolis (a wax like material made by bees), then buried under the ground. There it would be preserved indefinitely. If a man had a lot of honey to bring home he sent for his wife and daughters to come and carry it. Sometimes the whole family will have moved to the forest for the duration of the men's stay there. In any case they would return again to their permanent home in the lower areas of Sasaondet to await the next flowering in another forest.

This pattern of seasonal migration obviously encourages limited possessions. If no one is remaining behind at home, all one's possessions have to be taken or they will probably be stolen. Dwellings must be easily constructed and abandoned without regret (fleas frequently facilitate this). The Ogiek hut is an oblong shaped affair made of bent over saplings covered with cedar bark and insulated on the sides with leaves (to keep warm, like the bees). The Ogiek on Mau have a material inventory of perhaps 200 items. Excluding personal ornaments and artifacts acquired with the new technology of animal husbandry and cultivation, the traditional inventory is about 90 items, many of them very small. No family probably has all of them; borrowing them as need is common. A family carries all its possessions themselves.

Honey has many uses. It is, of course, primarily food, and the perferred food, though an Ogiek feels most satisfied when he has both honey and meat. It is sold or traded to Maasai who use it primarily for making a honey wine, but also as an essential ritual substance mixed with milk. Perhaps half of all honey that is brought home for family use is made into honey wine. The Ogiek affinity for drinking is considerable; consequently it is of major social importance for better or for worse. Ritually, honey water or honey wine is the essential ingrediant of purification and as such it is

conceived to have medicinal properties. It is the vehicle of communication with ancestral spirits (oiik) by which misfortune is allayed or avoided by propitiating the annoyance of persons now dead. Through the medium of the elders, it is with honey wine that the blessings of "god" (tororet) are bestowed in "ceremonies" (tumdo). Honey on certain occasions is given as a symbol of the establishment of new relations. On other occasions it symbolizes the nurturant responsible or status of one person or group of people to another. Traditionally it is a principle part of the brideprice payment, and compensation for damages such as theft and murder. Considering the amount of work involved in collecting what is a relatively small amount of honey each year, one might wish to question the rationality of the Ogiek. An understanding of the wide range of non-economic uses of honey, however, clearly shows that in the Ogiek mind all this effort is well worth while.

Hunting

The word hunting is misleading in discussions of Ogiek utilization of fauna. Among tribes of the eastern U.S.A., it is probably an accurate description of what happens; you spend a lot of time "hunting" for an animal, and relatively little time shooting and killing it. In some other countries with more efficient methods (dogs, drivers), you spend little time hunting for the game, a lot of time shooting and little time killing (guns are truly efficient). For the Ogiek all three are important depending on how you go about it, what you are after, and where you are. Generally the smaller the animal the more the emphasis on hunting and shooting. With larger animals, killing involves the most expenditure of time.

In the high forest the Ogiek eat essentially the same animals that the leopard does. In Soyua, the Ogiek eat about the same as do the lion. Chasing these animals off a kill for the purpose of getting the meat is done by Ogiek when the opportunity presents itself.

There are a number of techniques which Ogiek use to acquire meat, depending on where they are, as the place largely determines vegetation and therefore the type of game available. The following are the full range of techniques: use a bow and five types of arrows; two types of spears; five types of traps; and a pole.

1. The Bow. The Ogiek use a 5 foot bow of slender proportions, but with a surprisingly heavy pull (about 60 pounds). Their arrows are slender and relatively short. They have a fletching of three and sometimes two-four vanes depending on how heavy the head is that has to be rotated. These are three iron head types. One is a slender 6" wire with two small barbs on the end. On the iron shaft a coating of poison is put. This arrow is effective on anything, even on elephant. Primarily it is intended for heavy game like buffalo, rhino, sometimes elephant, and eland, giraffe and zebra. It is, however, often used on smaller antelope and in defense against enemies. All of these types of animals are to be found in Soyua. They are best hunted alone or in a party when each hunter stalks his own animal. The poison is effective within a few minutes to a couple of hours depending on size and species. Man has the reputation of expiring as fast as any, though perhaps a chicken is faster. The Ogiek prefer the open areas of Soyua in which to hunt the dangerous game, as it affords unobstructed escape. In the case of buffalo and rhino the usual avenua of escape is up a tree. With elephant a pair of fast legs is the only thing that helps, plus avoiding being upwind of the animal.

Dogs are an important part of Ogiek hunting, so important in fact, that without them occupation of the high forest would be problematical. In Soyua, however, they are useful mostly on buffalo and warthog. The other animals do not come to bay easily so the efforts of dogs are wasted. With warthog, the technique is different. The dogs chase a warthog until he goes down a hole. The hunter finds the hole because of his dogs, otherwise the wary warthog would give him the slip most of the time. He then seals it closed with logs, digs another hole vertically into the passageway behind the logs, and then waits for the warthog to come up to the logs at which time a spear is plunged into him.

A second type of arrow is a large double-edged blade arrow, a type which Kipsigis also use. This one, because of its massiveness (one blade may be 8" long and one inch wide) is for short distance use against smaller antelope up to the size of an Impala. Shot in a vital area the large blade produces enough bleeding or damage to cause the animal to die quickly. This kind is used in Soyua and Sasaondet either by individuals or in groups in a drive.

A third type is a bird arrow. A shaft is cut such that its business end remains large like a blunt cone. Two feathers or none may be used. Mostly boys use these to practice their skill on shooting birds which they usually do not eat. In fact, traditionally Ogiek never ate birds, though nowadays many have gotten over their reluctance.

A fourth type is a monkey arrow. A long narrow shaft with two feathers and a sharpened tip on which poison is placed. Shooting monkeys (for their skins) is costly in arrows as you miss most of the time. Therefore the expense of iron heads is not wasted, the poison alone will do the job in a few minutes.

The fifth arrow is for protection against enemies. The Kipsigis also use this type. It is a blade arrow with a series of barbs behind the blade. Once shot into someone it can't be extracted without hospital surgery and that is the point: The cattle thief must go to the hospital where the staff will automatically know he has been up to something, and will pry the answer out of him before removing the arrow head. Or so it is said in theory! The monkey arrow is used in the high forest, its lightness sustains it in long flight and flat trajectory, essential to shooting into the high trees. The bird arrow is used mostly in Soyua where most birds seem to be found. The protection arrow is also primarily used in Soyua, the place of cows and enemies.

Getting meat in the high forests is a different matter entirely compared to Soyua. Because of the density it is dangerous to hunt the biggest animals there. Most of the other animals of Soyua don't live in the forest either. Those that do are difficult to find by eye because of the density, and if found they can easily hide. Hunting with a bow, therefore, is not productive except by driving and there are more productive ways to get meat than driving.

In the forest the dog is the most important means of getting meat. The reason is that the most plentiful large animal in the forest can easily be brought to bay -- the giant forest hog. Any Ogiek who has at least two or three brave dogs can be sure of getting one of these animals every time he goes out for them. The technique is to walk along the top of a ridge until the dogs scent the trail of the hog where it has crossed from one valley to another. The dogs will take off quickly and within a few minutes catch up and bring the hog to bay. The risk in this type of hunting is that the hog will begin to serious wound or kill your dogs with his sharp lower incisors. Therefore it is essential that the hunter runs as fast as he can after his dogs to be on the scene right after the hog is cornered, spearing before it cuts the dogs.

The same technique works as well on bongo, though these animals are infrequently encountered. From the foregoing account it should be clear that it is the spear and not the bow which is the more useful weapon in the high forests. Without good dogs, however, an Ogiek must make due with his bow.

2. Traps. One of the most productive and efficient methods of getting game is from traps. The Ogiek use five types. Two are spring traps that use a noose to catch the front leg or the head of the animal as it proceeds along a game trail. These traps use a light foot sapling or pole as the spring to raise the animal into the air. The trigger mechanism is a small platform set over a hole on a trail and covered with soil. A noose surrounds the platform on the foot trap, or is suspended above for the neck trap. An animal foot on the platform releases the trigger and up goes the noose. These traps are effective for bushbuck, suni, red duiker, and even giant forest hog and leopard

in all high forest areas. The Ogiek calculate it takes about 20 traps to keep a family in meat all the time; i.e., on average of about two bushbuck-size animals per week. Usually these traps will be set within easy walking distance of a man's home, so that he can check them every day.

Another kind of trap which is rarely used these days is the pit trap. On a game trail a pit is dug 2 feet wide, 8 feet long and 5 or 6 feet deep. It is primarily for buffalo, which being wider than 2 feet at the shoulder and rear, get stuck with their feet dangling into the hole, unable to manouver to get out. Smaller animals like bushbuck find the hole so deep they can't get out easily.

A pole is used to drive hyrax from hollow trees. On dropping to the ground the dogs quickly dispatch the hyrax.

Children make two traps for birds. One is like a box trap made of branches formed into a log cabin like box which is tilted up on one end. A bird coming for the seeds placed under it, trips the simple trigger and the box falls on it. The other trap is a simple version of the leg-noose trap.

Besides the use of a blade-headed forest spear for warthog, giant forest hog and bongo, there is a very different spear peculiar to only the Ogiek which is used for elephants, though sometimes for rhino and buffalo. This is one of the more obvious diagnostic artifacts of this tribe (some others being: the hut, distinctive pottery styles, forest spear, bushbuck and hyrax capes, extensive use of dogs, distinctive hives and the honey basket). For each group the design varies but the principle is the same: a shaft of wood, enlarged at both ends with a hole in the front to accept a short arrow like projection of wood with a metal barbed head, the foreshaft being liberally covered with poison equivalent to 15 arrows. The emotional quality of hunting the elephant for the Ogiek is similar to that of Maasai hunting the lion. Though a group may go together, a man spears his elephant alone by very carefully and quietly coming upwind to within 12 feet and throwing the spear into its side, then leaving promptly. A second spear head is usually necessary to kill the elephant. Dispite the obvious danger, which the Ogiek are the first to admit is great, no one in memory has ever been killed by an elephant, or for that matter by any other animal. This they modestly suggest must be due to their cleverness and skill, which they contrast to the emphasis on brute strength which Maasai display, and consequent loss of life.

All these patterns of subsistence show variation through the year as well as on the ground. The changes are directly related to rainfall. When the rains begin there is a general feeling of relief, as then the Ogiek know that soon there will be honey and plenty to eat and drink, that the ceremonies that have been delayed can be held, and the things they want to buy can be purchased through sale of the honey. But first there is the rainy season to cope with, and this can be the most lean time of the year. The trees are too wet to climb, or at least climb with relative ease, and besides there is unlikely to be much honey anyway. Trapping with noose traps is nearly useless as the nooses rot out in a couple weeks. Also the animals do not wander the trails in search of food as there is enough locally. Going to the forest for meat, such as giant forest hog, is unpleasant because of the wet (the Ogiek say in the forest it always rains twice: "when the rain falls from the sky and then when the rain falls from the trees"). Still food must be had and a man must go and get some whether it be easy or not.

After the rains stop, the honey collecting begins, and the men or the whole family go to the forest for extended periods. It is a time of plenty. But as the dry season progresses, the honey is finished, animals begin to migrate in search of vegetation and water and they become harder to find, even with dogs. If the dry season is long, an increasing emphasis is put on making and selling items to Maasai (or anthropologists!). So as to buy maize meal, potatoes, and beans to tied them over. Faces are long, laughter is infrequent, and conversation scarce. Not having as much food as one wants is a frequent, Ogike complaint. When a person comes from another place he relates the news, the first thing emphasized being [illegible]kness and hunger.

Conclusion

In the foregoing account I have purposely limited my discussion to aspects of Ogiek ecology which would be of major interest to anthropologists, especially archeologists and physical anthropologists concerned with the evolution of man and culture. The Ogiek are an unusual hunting and gathering group with respect to their emphasis on high forest adaptation, the importance of honey, and the virtual lack of wild vegetable foodstuffs in their diet, with a consequent heavy dependence on meat. In their traditional diet Ogiek probably ate five times as much meat as honey and virtually no wild vegetable foodstuffs. This contrasts sharply with many dry-country hunters and gatherers whose diet is primarily berries, nuts, tubers etc., and secondarily meat. Perhaps the closest African parallel is with the Pygmies who also emphasize honey and meat, and live in a mature forest zone of considerable rainfall.

Perhaps more than any other tribe in Kenya, the Ogiek have suffered from misconceptions and prejudices which have hurt their claims to certain rights as a legitimate tribe, especially with respect to land. I hope that an unbiased appraisal of their history and culture, especially with respect to their willingness and potential to make an important contribution to the country as a whole, will result in a clearer and wider understanding of who and what they really are.

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